

DON DEAVER

Amthor: This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri in the 1940s* program. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support from the National Endowment of the Humanities. Today is February 2, 2009. We're here at T.J.'s café in King City, Missouri, in Gentry County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. We're here to interview Don Deaver, and his birth date is April 26, 1927. He lived in the 1940s and this is his story of life during that time period, including World War II, and he served in the Navy, and his highest rank that he achieved was Carpenter's Mate Second Class.

Amthor: Don, can you tell us a little bit about your background? Tell us where and when you were born?

Deaver: I was born in Otego, Kansas, that's a little town north of highway 36 about ten miles I think it had a population of about fifty people. It no longer exists anymore – completely gone, but that's where I was born, and my mom and dad, and I had a sister that was nine years older than I was and my Dad was a mail carrier. He started carrying mail when he was twenty years old and they done away with the post office in Otega, and they transferred him to Shawnee, Kansas, and he was there for three years, and he traded for a mail route in King City, so I migrated with them, at that time mail carriers were allowed to make a mutual transfer; a trade and we had a mail carrier in King City that thought he'd like to live down by Kansas City, so he traded routes. I was eleven years old when I came to King City, and I've been here ever since. I was originally a Jay Hawker – but that's why we ended up in King City. We moved here in June of 1938 and I started to school that fall in the sixth grade, and as I say, I've been here ever since.

Amthor: Okay. So what was life like in 1940?

Deaver: Well, it was a lot different than it is now. I graduated in 1945 from high school, once in a while if you could get ten cents you could come down to Deshler's Café and get a chili dog for a nickel, and a Coke for a nickel and spend a whole dime. I remember once in a while on Sundays after church Dad would take us to John Deshler's for Sunday dinner which we didn't do too often, and I can remember Dad telling Mom later that the meals through the week were fifteen cents, but on Sunday they raised it to a quarter. So he spent a whole dollar for the four of us for Sunday dinner plate lunch. I've often thought about that – how things change from that. A tip was unheard of in those days; you were lucky to have the dollar, I guess. My Dad retired from the mail route and he carried mail for forty-eight years. After I came home from the Navy, I went to work in the post office as a clerk, and worked there thirteen months, transferred to a mail route and retired on December 4, 1994 and had forty-seven and a half years counting my clerk time and Navy time. It cost 25 cents to go to the movie. We had two movies here in town at that time.

Amthor: Did you remember some of the movies you went and saw?

Deaver: Movies with Betty Gable, I know of, they had news releases, before the movies started they were showing us how the war had already started and they had pictures on the news reels of

what was taking place overseas and pilots flying in, and tanks, whatever. It was quite different. I graduated in May of 1945 and went immediately to Great Lakes to boot camp. I was there nine weeks, came home for a seven day furlough, or leave; Army called it a furlough, in the Navy it was called leave, and I went back to Great Lakes, caught a train to California – Shoemaker, California, and was there about three days and caught a ship and headed for Hawaii, and went to Hawaii and went to communications school and then back on the ship later and I was there about three months in Hawaii. From there we went to Okinawa, we hauled troops it was called an APA troop transport; we could haul about three thousand men with all their equipment. That's kind of what a stint in my Navy career did, and the war was soon over then,, which I was thankful for, because we saw the battle plan – they showed it to us when we were in Okinawa one time about we were going to invade Japan and they had the series of troops and divisions of Army going into Japan and we were going to come in there in the second wave, and I'm sure we thought we lost a lot of men in Normandy, and we did, but I say this would have been worse than Normandy. They'd have killed a lot more people and I probably wouldn't be here today if they'd made that invasion, because I was in the second wave we were going to come into there – it would have been real bad. But the atomic bomb solved that problem and ended the war.

Amthor: What did you hear about propaganda? Before the war? What did you hear about Europe and China?

Deaver: We knew that in Europe that Hitler was predicting he was going to rule the world, and he was slaughtering the Jews by the thousands. We had, of course, Tokyo Rose in the Pacific trying to demoralize the troops and I can't think of the lady's name in Europe.

Amthor: Axis Sally

Deaver: Axis Sally; she was doing the same thing that Tokyo Rose did in the South Pacific – we knew that Pearl Harbor was a bad thing – I mean a terrible thing. It was on a Sunday morning when people were at church and it took a long time to recover from that and our ships were not very well equipped – I didn't know it at the time, but I later learned from sailors that were there at the time; we didn't have sonar or radar on the ships. That was developed during World War II, their anti-aircraft guns was loaded by hand and they didn't have the technology that we were fortunate to have later in the war. It was a brutal thing that happened.

Amthor: Did you say – you were saying that you went into the Navy. Were you drafted, or did you enlist?

Deaver: I enlisted.

Amthor: Why that branch of service?

Deaver: Because I talked to fellows that were in the service, and I decided that I would rather sleep on a clean sheet than in a fox hole, and so I enlisted in the Navy, or I would have ended up in the Army if I hadn't enlisted. Nothing against the soldiers – bless their hearts – but I just thought fox holes didn't look near as good as a clean sheet.

Amthor: So you're basic – you talked about your basic training earlier. Do you have any memories of that? How was life in basic training?

Deaver: I was eighteen years old, I thought it was bad then, it wasn't the best in the world. At the time I went into the Navy I went to Great Lakes for basic training for nine weeks, they were still drafting up to 38 years old; there was a hundred and fifty in my company and four of them were 38 year olds and I thought they were old men at the time, and when we would run the obstacle courses and we'd go out on Lake Michigan and row a whale boat around which I never thought was doing us any good, but we were wearing a lot of blisters on our hands and they couldn't keep up, and I thought, "Man, they're old men." Then you know when I got to be thirty-eight, I looked back at that and thought about that and I couldn't keep up with an eighteen year old when I was thirty-eight years old. The company commander, he really abused us eighteen years old. I mean they'd get us out of the bunks at two o'clock in the morning and get us out and we'd have to do calisthenics and but them 38 year olds, they didn't take that very well and they didn't do that kind of stuff and I guess they were – well, they were older than my company commander and he didn't give them any problems and they didn't get extra details like us young guys did. I look back on it and it wasn't that bad, but we thought it was terrible at the time.

Amthor: How was the food?

Deaver: It wasn't too bad.

Amthor: What was an average meal like?

Deaver: Well, we had lots of beans and I remember that they had big stainless steel vats and when they made lemonade they stood on a stool and it looked like a boat oar and they were stirring the sugar in. It would hold probably 100 gallon of lemonade. We got some bad lemonade one day and they had a poor guy that was stirring and he wanted 50 pounds of sugar and they thought it was a trick and he gave him 50 pounds of salt and he poured in and wrecked a batch of lemonade. They were all in trouble in the galley, needless to say. We had better cooks on the ships. The crew got to sit down and eat and the troops had to stand up and eat. They could stand more people up at the tables. We got in a storm one time and we couldn't cook; so we are sardines out of the can for two days.

Amthor: What was the name of the ship that you were serving on?

Deaver: The *U.S.S. Chilton*.

Amthor: How does it compare – I just recently saw the *Missouri* out there in Hawaii; how does it compare to size?

Deaver: It would be pretty small compared to that, because the *Missouri* was a big battleship. This was a troop transport. It was big, but I mean nothing compared to those big battleships. When we were on the trips from Okinawa back to California, we'd come across the Bering Strait, where the Bering Strait came into the Pacific, and that cold water coming out of the Arctic

into the warm water, the water was always rough there and we got in a bad storm there once – for three days and two nights and we were five hundred miles off course when we finally got out of it and it settled down regardless of which way you're going or where you want to go, you keep the bow into the waves – the big swells will capsize even a big ship, when they get that big. It was interesting and we looked like an ice berg when we got through.

Amthor: So what was your specific duty? What was your job?

Deaver: We were taking care of repairs. Then I'd get galley duty once in a while when I had spare time and then I went to communications school in Hawaii they were preparing us for the invasion of Japan and they was going to send us ashore with the troops to lay telephone lines, and communication lines, and if you'd – I've just been reading a book now about the battle in the European theatre and Germany where they were going up across Germany and they were laying those wires on the ground ; the tanks would run over them and ruin their communications, and everything they had done was lost and they'd have to re-string in the battlefield to string those lines so they could communicate with one another; they didn't have the walky-talky's that we have today. It was different.

Amthor: Did you see any combat?

Deaver: No.

Amthor: So you weren't in an area where you saw a lot of casualties or destruction?

Deaver: No. The war was winding down real fast and by that time and I was very lucky; very fortunate.

Amthor: Did you form a lot of friendships and camaraderie while you were in there?

Deaver: I did but we moved around so much and for different jobs , you get acquainted then somebody would transfer somewhere else, and you'd lose track of them. By the way, we had real good friendships while it lasted. We saw lots of movies.

Amthor: That was the main entertainment

Deaver: Yes.

Amthor: Was there movies on ship?

Deaver: Yes.

Amthor: They didn't have any USO or Red Cross that would come up on board?

Deaver: We hauled Red Cross nurses but they stayed up on the bridge where the accommodations were a lot better.

Amthor: With officers.

Deaver: Yes.

Amthor: So what did you do for recreation on board other than movies? Did you play cards, did you – some of them mentioned poker. . .

Deaver: Once in a while they'd play a few cards, and a little poker, but usually we just didn't have time. I mean, by the time we finished the day we were ready to crawl in the sack, and that was it till they bugled Reveille in the morning and you'd hit the deck again and go, it was a busy time.

Amthor: What time did you have to get up in the morning?

Deaver: We usually got up at five o'clock and soon as we could get in bed that night we went to bed.

Amthor: So you really didn't have any time you went to bed, it was just whenever you were able to?

Deaver: Yes.

Amthor: Did you have a specific time?

Deaver: No if we could get to bed at nine o'clock, we'd go to bed. We went ashore on Okinawa and they had movies there. They had a beer garden. [Laugh] At that time I smoked and I bought name brand cigarettes for fifty cents a carton and there was no tax on them, overseas, things were cheap, we'd buy candy bars, Snickers by the case for 50 cents, and we always had plenty of candy bars.

Amthor: How was the beer? Were you just going to say that? Was it U.S. beer?

Deaver: It was all bottle beer, and when I was going to communication school, I hadn't ought to tell this, but [laugh] in Hawaii, why we'd go in on liberty to Hawaii for a weekend and they had a beer garden there and they had big high sided wagons, four wheeled wagon; we'd call them a ensilage wagon today; they had SP's there; you could go in and get two bottles at a time and you had to come back out and come between these two wagons and you threw the empty bottles up in that wagon, and when you got so you couldn't hit that wagon, no more beer.

[Laughter]

Deaver: Probably didn't want that on there, did you?

Amthor: No, that's fine – we like the funny stories. Some of them talked about, you know, what you ate and maybe losing weight. Did you feel like you lost weight or gained weight when you were in the Navy?

Deaver: I put – kind of maintained my weight, I really did. Well, you got so you couldn't eat the scrambled eggs very well; they were made out of powdered eggs and powdered milk, you could smell them when they was cooking, but otherwise, it wasn't too bad. On Sunday mornings we always had fresh made cinnamon rolls and they done a good job on the cinnamon rolls.

Amthor: So you didn't – on board ship you probably didn't have any rationing like they were doing on the home front?

Deaver: No.

Amthor: You didn't have to deal with any of that.

Deaver: Didn't have to eat C rations – only time we ate them when we had that couple of days but they didn't have C rations even on board; we might have welcomed them after about a day on sardines.

Amthor: How did you communicate home?

Deaver: Letters. I know they sent a Christmas box, but I never did get it. They told me what was in it, and it sounded good – it was letters.

Amthor: How long did it usually take?

Deaver: Well, it depended on when you got to a port, when you could get mail. When I was on Hawaii, three months, it was pretty regular, no problems. That was real nice too – you never ate real pineapple until you eat that fresh pineapple right off the trees there, and it was really good.

Amthor: What did you think about D-Day – the ending of the war?

Deaver: I thought it was great.

Amthor: Where were you at that time?

Deaver: I was trying to think. Huh. Can't even remember now.

Amthor: It would have happened a year before you went

Deaver: I went in.

Amthor: You were still in high school

Deaver: Yes, I was still in high school; a good friend of mine and I were working on an old radio down in his basement, trying to get it so it would work. We got it so it would work, and

we got it to work well enough that they began to talk about D-Day and the Germans had surrendered.

Amthor: How did you feel about the dropping of the atomic bomb, and did you agree with President Truman when he ordered that?

Deaver: Well, we did at the time, because as I say, we knew about the invasion into Tokyo, we were going to hit the beach over there. It was terrible on the Japanese people – that atomic people, but it probably saved a lot of their lives and a lot of our lives that the attack could have gone ahead and materialized so it was a sad situation, but it might have been bad the other way, too.

Amthor: Now did you hear about any of the camps in the United States where they were rounding up the Japanese people into the – did you hear anything about that?

Deaver: Yes, they were – I read about it and heard about it on the news. When I was in Shoemaker, California, waiting to be shipped out, they had a German prison camp there on the base; they wore bright orange coveralls with a big POW on the back, they had a big high fence around them, and we walked right down the sidewalk. They was just laying out in the sun and enjoying life, I mean, they weren't mistreated in any way that I could see; they were just kind of out lazily laying in the sun, and they looked clean shaven and healthy and they was probably glad to be where they was instead of over there on a battlefield.

Amthor: Where and what were you doing when you got the news that the war was completely over?

Deaver: That was in 1945 and – was I in boot camp?

Amthor: You'd only been in about three months

Deaver: Yes, that'd be in about

Amthor: When they dropped the atomic bomb

Deaver: Yes.

Kelley: Then shortly after that it ended in Japan – well, you went in, in May of 1945 and that was when the war in Europe was over, actually, wasn't it?

Deaver: Yes. I know when we left San Francisco got on the ship and we had lights out as soon as it got dark and we zigzagged and it took us seven days just to get to Pearl Harbor from there by zigzagging so much, and they were still concerned about submarines.

Amthor: Did you meet any submarines or anything?

Deaver: No. Well, ours -within Pearl Harbor.

Amthor: How did you get back home?

Deaver: I came into Shoemaker, California, got on a train and went to Lambert Field in St. Louis; got discharged there and got a train from there to Kansas City and they met me at Union Station and brought me home.

Amthor: Did you have a nice reception with your family and friends?

Deaver: Yes.

Amthor: How did you think the people treated you when you got home?

Deaver: Oh, just fine; they were glad to see me.

Amthor: Did you adjust well back to civilian life?

Deaver: I'd say yes.

Amthor: Have you contacted or stayed in touch with the people you served with?

Deaver: Lost track of all of them.

Amthor: Did you join the American Legion or the VFW?

Deaver: Yes. Belong today to the American Legion.

Amthor: Are you proud to be a veteran of World War II?

Deaver: Yes.

Amthor: After the war, were you concerned about the Soviet Union's spread of Communism?

Deaver: Yes, I'd say that I was, they said that World War II would be the war to end all wars, but we know that the Bible tells us different.

Amthor: Do you think our leaders handled the situation well, or could they have done things differently?

Deaver: In World War II, you mean?

Amthor: Yes.

Deaver: I think they done real well. I think we started up real quick and had to learn as we went, and as I say, we had to develop a lot of technology during that time that we didn't have at the start of the war.

Amthor: Did you take advantage of the GI Bill for education or any of the housing opportunities?

Deaver: No, I didn't.

Amthor: What do you think is the difference between today's war and the war that you were in?

Deaver: Well, they're not going to fight in fox holes anymore. That hand-to-hand combat out - more firepower from airplanes, and we hope not nuclear but it's a whole new ballgame now than what it was then, or ever will be.

Amthor: Do you see any similarities between the economy and the war in the 1940s to today? The economy?

Deaver: We didn't make a lot of money in the 40s, but it didn't take a lot of money. We didn't have the crime that we have today, and right now, the economy is worse than I ever saw it in my lifetime; and we have so many drugs and crimes, and we never had drugs back then, beer was about the only drug we had.

Amthor: What do you think shifted it from the time between the 40s and 50s and now? What do you think values changed?

Deaver: I think money has had a lot to do with it. People want more things today, even myself I guess, - my kids even want to start out where I was when I spent my life getting there, you know, and they want to start out there. New home, new car, new pickup, new boat, it's not all bad, but I think money is the root of all evil sometimes, and I think it's proving itself in this day and time.

Amthor: If there was a special thing or something you could tell students from this point - what was the one thing that really stood out in your memory of your experience in World War II or during your life in the 40s?

Deaver: I look back and it was a real good time; seemed like we had lots of fun and didn't cost much. I look back on my time, especially in high school, it was a fun time.

Amthor: We've heard this a lot of the women that were on the home front, they remember it was good; I mean the life was good during that time period.

Deaver: Everybody got a long, and as I say, there was no drugs. We never locked the house a night and you went to St. Joe, you never locked the house, you know, and you going to be gone three or four days, you never locked the house. Nothing ever disappeared. Everybody respected everybody and it was a great time and there's nothing wrong with today's - I mean we have nice things today we didn't have then like television and cell phones and [laugh] cars just out of this world, you know. I'd hate to go back to those old times no electricity.

Amthor: Did you have electricity in the 1940s?

Deaver: Yes, I did. Now I didn't when I lived out in Kansas. We had coal oil lamps, and no running water, but then when Dad got transferred to Shawnee, Kansas, we got a house with electricity and running water, and we thought that was really uptown, and when we moved to King City in 1938 we had all those nice things, too.

Amthor: How about the rural areas? Did they have that? I know that the cities got it first, but did the rural areas have it as much?

Deaver: They started getting REA, running lines through the country, and they caught up pretty fast. I think some of my friends it was late '40s maybe '50 before they got electricity in some areas in the country, and they began to dig wells, or had wells and put in pumps.

Amthor: Plumbing?

Deaver: . . . plumbing in, pumps in the wells when they got electricity.

Amthor: When did the first telephones come through the lines come through rural areas?

Deaver: Oh, I think they were back in the '30's.

Amthor: Further back?

Deaver: Yes.

Amthor: You had phones?

Deaver: Yes, we had phones – I know out in the country they ran their own telephone lines and all the neighbors went together and built their lines and kept their lines up and so they had telephones.

Amthor: The '40s were interesting because they were – a lot of them were getting the electricity and the plumbing, and things that they never had before.

Deaver: Yes, I ran on to a paper, a bill of sale here a while back; my dad bought a new 1940 Chevrolet it was \$860 – got the bill of sale on it. Bought it in Maysville. They've gone up considerably since then.

Amthor: Okay, well is there any other comment that you'd like to share this us?

Deaver: I guess not, I think I maybe talked too long now.

Amthor: No, there's – you can never talk too much, but I do appreciate your time and meeting you.

Deaver: Nice to meet you.

Amthor: This has been a great interview.

Deaver: Maybe I told some things I hadn't ought to have. [laugh]

Amthor: You don't find these things in the textbooks.